

## “THE WALKING DEAD”: “What Lies Ahead” & “Bloodletting” (TV Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman  
Friday, 14 October 2011 14:09

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In only six episodes, the first season of AMC’s THE WALKING DEAD at once contained exciting promise and great disappointment. Losing its way in the second half of its short run, the series became something much broader, with fewer of the stellar intimate and nuanced moments it had strived for and achieved in its earlier segments. Thankfully, the first two installments of its sophomore season—“What Lies Ahead,” premiering this Sunday, October 16, and “Bloodletting,” following on Oct. 23—aim, with great success, to get the show back on track.

As you might imagine, our ensemble is on the road again, following the grandiose silliness that took place at the CDC. While specific aspects won’t be divulged here, the massive amount of immobile highway traffic becomes the least of their worries when a series of obstacles hit, the first of which being a literal herd of walkers that puts in motion one of the premiere’s best and most tense sequences. Admirably, two things seem to be of paramount importance so far: human drama, as there’s plenty of interpersonal, and introspective, conflict going around the RV, and copious blood. These two episodes are dripping in grue, some of it disconcertingly digital, but still effective and exciting enough for the show to be both emotionally honest and devastating.



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The biggest improvement, however, comes in the form of Shane (Jon Bernthal), who is once again three-dimensional. In an amazing departure from the comics, THE WALKING DEAD previously brought Shane to life, giving the audience an opportunity to empathize with the frankly shitty place he finds himself. But as the final episodes of season one descended, so did Shane, as he responded to his tough, stressful situation by making cartoonishly evil decisions, like putting Rick (Andrew Lincoln) in his sights. It didn't ring true to the portrait the series' creators had been painting, and it's a trait that has been remedied in the early portions of season two.

“Bloodletting”—an even better installment than the premiere—serves to only put forth more faith in the evolution of the series, as the highly anticipated introduction of Herschel's farm (a key locale in the comics) is a total breath of fresh air. There are some truly grating characters on THE WALKING DEAD, and this new batch of folks who are seemingly being set up as more than just zombie fodder are a welcome addition—particularly Scott Wilson, who essays Herschel with stern compassion.



Dale (Jeffrey DeMunn), of course, remains one of the best of our original group. He's thoughtful, witty and seriously conflicted over Andrea (Laurie Holden), and DeMunn is a total pro, reminding us just how important character is in raising the stakes of a horror story. The creators and writing staff of THE WALKING DEAD very much know this as well, and while the main conceits of both episodes won't be revealed, suffice to say they start the second season on two very high and taut notes, putting not just “red shirts” in serious danger.

In this first pair of episodes, THE WALKING DEAD has begun ascension back toward being the show we'd all hoped and knew it could be. It now remains to be seen just what effect a 13-episode season, and the behind-the-scenes issues (hinted at by former showrunner Frank

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Darabont taking the pseudonymous “Ardeth Bey” as his writing credit on the first ep), will have later on, but on the strength of “What Lies Ahead” and “Bloodletting,” we’ll most definitely be sticking around to find out.

